

Selected Interviews With Thomas Park

Kosmik Leprechaun Interviews Thomas Park/Grid Resistor

October 10, 2017

KL: Good evening, Thomas.

Thomas: Hi there!

KL: How are you?

Thomas: Good, and you?

KL: Pretty good, thank you! There's an air show happening all over my city.... Fighter jets are constantly zooming by my house, but it's not tooooo bad this year. Still loud.

Thomas: Ah. Time for headphones?

KL: Hehe. Yes

KL: So, what have you been up to lately? Obviously, Grid Resistor is your latest project. And, I'm not sure if everyone knows yet. But, you have recently retired your most well-known project, Mystified. How does it feel to have this metamorphosis from one artistic ideal, to another?

Thomas: Well, it's a bit of a relief. I felt that, as mystified, I had this need to always be successful- get the plays, the sales, the statistics. I was very conscious that I needed to impress people. Now I am free to do my own thing.

KL: Right! That makes a lot of sense.

Thomas: Grid Resistor was kind of a comment on the music industry and music in general-- exploring whether music is essentially mechanical. Kind of cynical, but that was part of the notion.

KL: Hmm! That's funny. 'Cynical'... I never imagine you to be cynical! But, we all get like this sometimes... Do you feel you'd accomplished everything you set out to do with Mystified? It was a very long-time project of yours...

Thomas: Yes. Listening to the archives, I felt-- this was the musical exploration I meant to undertake. I am happy with most of the work, and I think it expressed what I wanted it to.

KL: That's very good.

Thomas: It was a project that lasted about 15 years-- roughly 2002-2017.

KL: Wow! excellent. You're absolutely welcome.... I am honored to have released 2 of your albums, as well as the compilation tracks you generously donated to CGR.

Thomas: Thank you.

KL: How do you feel about the future of Grid Resistor? I like the project very much! Very much a departure in sound from your previous projects.

Thomas: Well, Grid Resistor is essentially finished, too. The goal was to have one release for every letter in the Greek Alphabet.

KL: Wow. I did not know that.

Thomas: If I was smart, I'd spend more energy spreading the word about those releases-- there's about 26 hours of drone composed using machines.

KL: You mean, spread the word about Grid Resistor?

Thomas: Yes. Grid Resistor, for sure, and the other acts, too. I have shifted to archiving a lot of material lately, and I want to make sure that people know where to find the stuff if they want it.

KL: Ahh, yes. I see! By the way, the name "Grid Resistor"...may I ask.. what was the impetus behind selecting that name?

Thomas: Sure. I was looking for a band name that had a machines reference, but also seemed to suggest some kind of attitude. "Grid Resistors" are a real type of device-- and a lot of my covers for the act are treated images of them. They are comprised of a set of resistors laid out on a grid in a frame.

KL: Oh! That is what we are looking at when we look at that project's album covers! I had no idea! Thanks for sharing that bit of data.

Thomas: Yes. Most are images of Grid Resistors. Sure!

KL: So, you've finished Grid Resistor? What do you plan to do next? I know you are also quite a visual artist. I've seen your work in that medium. How long have you been active as a visual artist?

Thomas: Yes, Grid Resistor is basically finished, with a few exceptions. And I might do compilation appearances or collaborations.

KL: CGR Vol. V would love to have you.

Thomas: So, I have been doing the painting and printmaking thing for about 2 years. I always wanted to be a painter. and my wife encouraged me to buy a paint set and follow my dream. And thank you, for the compilation invite. I'd be glad to oblige.

KL: Wow. Good partner you have, Thomas. It's always good to be encouraged by our closest people...and you're quite welcome! What instruments do you / or have you played?

Thomas: Mainly the trombone. I studied piano for a bit. And-- I have a duffel bag full of carnival instruments, like a kazoo, slide whistle, nose flute and so forth.

KL: Oh wow! I too have a slide trombone... but it's missing some stuff, and I can only make noise with it.

Thomas: Ah. I recommend getting a P-Bone-- a plastic trombone. Sounds just like a brass one.

KL: So, you never went the route of 'guitar, bass, drums' that so many go through... Hmm!

Thomas: No. I was afraid if I did things the way others did, I would never make it.

KL: Wow! That is very interesting. because most people think "Oh, i'd better be just like all the rest... or else I'll stand out too much and be made fun of by the crowd." I like how you took an absolutely original approach.

Thomas: I always thought-- you have to either do things the usual way, but REALLY WELL, or do things differently, in your own way, you know?

KL: Yeah, that does make a lot of sense. Sure. Was this high school? Junior high? I mean, when you realized these things...

Thomas: That would be back around 1998 or so, when I started as AutoCad. I was writing fractal techno-- techno music based on math patterns. I felt that something unusual like that was the only way I'd get attention. I ended up getting in Spin Magazine for some of that work.

KL: 1998 would've been the perfect time for that type of sound. Ahhh, I most those days. Wow. Spin Magazine. Good.

Thomas: It seemed a good fit. I was at MP3.com, IUMA, sites like that.

KL: I gotta read that article sometime.

Thomas: https://archive.org/details/AutoCad_Logarithm

KL: Excellent. Thank you for the link... I wanted to ask... Were your parents, or anyone in your family also creative? Such as an artist, or musician? I'm blessed to have been born into a creative family. The reason I ask, is because you really seem quite cultured-- educated on creative matters.

Thomas: I consider my parents both to be creative. My father is an excellent musician and vocalist, though he has no ego at all about it. I have a niece who is essentially a prodigy at visual art.

KL: Excellent! I'm impressed. It makes a lot of sense. have they encouraged you also?

Thomas: At times my family has been-- well-- permissive is more the word. Honestly, I think the thing is that the music I have made is strange enough that they don't quite "get" it.

KL: Lol. I relate to that.

Thomas: My wife made a funny mouth sound while describing my music today. I wish I had recorded it.

KL: Hahaha.

Thomas: No hard feelings, though. I have my own audience.

KL: Lol. Right. Yeah, some sounds are not for everyone all the time. With music in general.

Thomas: Some sounds, and some genres, too.

KL: Right. You've crossed paths and touched upon so much... What is next for you? . . .Crossed stylistic paths, Touched upon so many genres.

Thomas: I have been focusing on archiving my material, for the future, and for posterity. I am only 46, but-- you never know.

KL: No. You are right.

Thomas: I also am still doing compilations, soundtracks, collaborations, and so forth.

KL: I'm going to write my will later.

Thomas: Wow. Nice. Smart of you.

KL: Nice. Thank you.

Thomas: Of course.

KL: Is there anything you'd like to say? Before we conclude our interview?

Thomas: Thanks to you for the time you have taken and for your support. If you ever need anything, feel free to look me up.

KL: Thank you, Thomas. I appreciate that. The feeling is the same. I hope you and your family have a nice evening. I'll be around also!

“Mystified By Mystified”- Cerebral Rift Interviews Thomas Park October 13, 2014

Introduction

I've joked a few times about how prolific some ambient artists are. But, Thomas Jackson Park (aka Mystified, Mister Vapor, and other names) has really proven that an artist can be prolific. With over 300 releases to his credit he has set the bar for me as a collector. I don't know that I could ever manage to acquire all of his works, much less listen to all of them. Not to mention, he has additional credits for some of his physical releases both as Mystified and Thomas Jackson.

Thomas is from Saint Louis, Missouri, but has moved around quite a bit: Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, California and Okinawa. He has been recording for 13 years, and has lost track of all the labels he has released works on. However, to list a few: First Fallen Star, Spotted Peccary, Droenhause, Treetrunk Records, Aural Films, Webbed Hand Records, Gears of Sand, 20kbps, Krakilsk, Dark Winter, Enough Records, Clinical Archives, Magnatune, Earth Mantra, and literally dozens more.

This interview was conducted over a month ago, and I offer my apologies for taking so long to publish it. There was, unfortunately, a technical mishap on my side that caused it to get lost in the shuffle. But, better late than never. Enjoy this insight into Thomas's works.

The Interview

Part One: General Questions

Please introduce yourself to our readers.

Hello! My name is Thomas Park. I am mainly known as the ambient/drone act, “Mystified”. I specialize in dark, often minimal music, though I have experimented quite a bit and have tried composing in many different genres.

Do you have any aliases?

Yes, Mystified and Mister Vapor. Others, as well, though they are secret.

[Ed: I could reveal a few of them...but I won't. :) I've never been totally certain if I've found all of them.]

How did you get into Netlabels / Netaudio?

Early on, I began to struggle funding physical releases. I believe it was Christopher McDill, through his netlabel, "Webbed Hand", that got me involved at first in netlabels.

Do you focus on specific styles of music?

My music often begins as a drone. It evolves from that point into something somewhat rhythmic or more developed, even melodic.

What are you working on at the moment?

Today I did an impromptu remix of a fellow Creative Commons artist's work.

What inspires you?

Great music. Symphonies often fill me with awe, especially by Ludwig Von Beethoven, a favorite composer of mine.

Name an artist, place, event, thing, etc. that has inspired you.

Another artist that used to inspire me was Robin Storey of Rapoon. He was able to work beyond conventional boundaries of music, in a Musique concrète style. I had the honor of collaborating with Mr. Storey, though we have fallen out of touch, unfortunately.

What drives you to create music?

I love occupying my mind during free time. I have been reading less, having burned out in college. There is something protean about creating, as well, which I enjoy.

What values do you wish your creativity to express?

Peace, a meditative quality, keeping the ear and mind open for epiphanies.

What role does community play in what you do?

My local community is only tangentially aware of my music, but the netlabel community has been very supportive. I frequently collaborate with other netlabel artists. They have helped my creativity to evolve.

Part Two: Creative Commons

When and why did you start releasing music under a Creative Commons license?

I started releasing Creative Commons music about 10 years ago. I was looking for a way to find an audience without spending large amounts of money on physical releases.

Do you release all your work under a Creative Commons license?

I also have released 2 CDs and 1 vinyl record, as well as a number of CD-Rs, tapes, and even a flash drive or two. Most of my online music is released under a Creative Commons license.

Any neat stories about releasing music under a Creative Commons license?

A PBS documentary maker picked me up to make some music for a documentary ("Diamond In The Dunes", 2014), first finding a net release of mine online. He was able to listen to my music, and also to use that as a starting off point for his project.

[Ed: Check out the [Wikipedia page for Diamond In The Dunes](#).]

Any negative stories about releasing music under a Creative Commons license?

No major problems. Almost all of my negative stories have happened when I have tried to make money with my music.

Part Three: The Future

What is next for you?

My music efforts have been winding down, as I got married this year and am paying more attention to my career. Those who pay attention will notice that I do still release a video, EP or net release every now and then, when I am feeling restless and have the time.

[Ed: Thomas has also been doing some artwork, which you will see on a few of his releases, and occasionally posted on various social networks. As for "winding down" his music efforts, that means he's just producing at the level of a typical artist, instead of the superhuman levels he's done in the past. :)]

In Closing

I joked above about Thomas's production level being "superhuman". But there are facts to back it up. Just looking at his Discogs profile, he has over 300 releases to his credit, with 183 Albums, 31 Singles / EP's, and 108 "other" releases... and that doesn't even cover all the compilations he has tracks on, and other credits.

Most of Thomas's works are generative in nature, which is to say they are based on the idea of generating tones or sequences, and creating works around them. Not exactly the kind of music that tends to find the widest audience, however for those who are interested in more experimental fields of music there is a lot to find in his work. This is a fact that has been noted in terms of systems-organized sound, as Daniel Barbiero has written about.

Thomas has created a body of work that is experimental and very interesting from many perspectives. He is someone that might not get a lot of attention, but it seems that he is somewhat comfortable with this, rather letting his works speak for themselves. It's this kind of artistry that makes the Commons far more interesting to explore than the standard music industry channels. He is one of the artists that will keep me listening to music coming out on Netlabels for years to come, where there are no boundaries.

Martin Hekker Interviews Thomas Park

January 28,2011

A SHORT INTERVIEW WITH MYSTIFIED Mystified has released a new CD of material on Magnatune, A Pale but Lasting Hope. It is pretty amazing; the CD can be previewed and purchased here. Thomas Park is no stranger to the Man-Machine comic. So it is a pleasure to be able to share a short email interview with the prolific ambient composer below. Thomas is one of the most laconic people I've ever known, which I think comes through in his music. His approach to music can be quite minimalistic. Sometimes the sounds seem to reflect just the right number of gestures and yet have a lot of craft to them. Mystified never goes for low hanging fruit. Although the music is ambient, it is not lounge music and is too jarring at times to qualify as space music.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE THINGS TO LISTEN TO THESE DAYS?

I have been enjoying some Fasel, C. Reider, some select tracks from Eno's new one, a little PBK, and a nice radiostream called "Leftob".

IN YOUR COLLEGE DAYS, YOU WERE A LATE NIGHT DJ ON WNUR'S FREEFORM SHOW. CAN YOU SAY SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR RADIO SHOW ON WNUR? DID YOU EVER INTERACT WITH YOUR LISTENERS?

The show was a lot of fun. I believe I went on 4-6 am. I came on after this total DJ guru-type and played lots of freeform madness. Best results seemed to be blending spoken word and other sounds with music. Yes, I did interact a bit, sometimes taking calls. But the 8 Swedish schoolgirls who called one morning I believe were just my college buddies. (THOMAS IS BEING TYPICALLY MODEST HERE. . . HIS SHOW WAS PRETTY WEIRD AND WONDERFUL AND

HE WOULD GET SOME PRETTY ODD CALLERS IN WEE HOURS OF THE MORNING).
HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN SOMETHING IS DONE?

That's a tough one, especially given how minimal I can be. I suppose the answer would be-- when I run out of ideas for it?

DO YOU EVER GO BACK TO A TRACK AND REVISE IT?

I have before, yes. Just recently I touched-up and re-rendered one of my 2010 releases, for example. I generally tend to move ahead, but if something seems to need work, and it is still possible, I will do it, yes.

YOU HAVE A GOOD TRACK RECORD OF COLLABORATION WITH OTHER MUSICIANS.
CAN YOU SAY SOMETHING ABOUT HOW YOU ARE ABLE TO WORK WITH SO MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE?

Well, it has a lot to do with my philosophy about art. I believe art is a creative activity. Therefore, pretty much all art is good. Almost all of it. So if you work with me, you are already doing something I like. I also think a skill of mine is to integrate different styles and sounds easily-- or maybe it's just that my software makes that so simple.

WHAT WERE YOUR FAVORITE RECORDS GROWING UP. DO ANY OF THEM STILL INFLUENCE YOU TODAY?

Joy Division, New Order, Meat Beat Manifesto, 808 State, KMFDM, the KLF, stuff like that. All of that early industrial music definitely is a powerful influence. If you don't like industrial music, much of my catalog becomes inaccessible.

IS THERE ANY KIND OF SOUND THAT YOU REALLY DON'T LIKE?

Well, I like little kids, but the sound of a baby crying really gets to me. But I think it's supposed to-- yes? Nature made it that way?

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A UFO?

Dozens.

Marcus Pan of Legends Magazine Interviews Thomas Park **January 13, 2001**

The world around us is a sublime thing, not only in vision but in sounds as well. Cacophony is everywhere. However, what you probably aren't aware of, is the soothing sounds one can pull from the constructs as well and the math that makes up everything around you.

AutoCad/Pantheist Audio's sole creator, Thomas Park, does just this, composing his music from fractal elements of constructs in the world around him. Fusing this with danceable rhythms and using more mathematics to define the rest of the track, Park has amassed a library of over 200 songs and his work has been hugely received on the Internet and featured in various offline media such as Spin as well. His work is precise, mathematical and as such can touch the listener at the base of their brain. Ethereal, smooth and mellow...be sure to check out the full review of some of Park's work by Wilde in this issue.

1. Thomas, you describe your music as Fractal Music of the Jackson/Strohbeen school. Can you give us a definition or some more insight into this?

Phil Jackson and Dave Strohbeen are musicians, composers, and experts in the fractal music field. Both of them, and, especially Phil Jackson, got me started.

2. Now I and most people I would assume know the basics of fractal imaging or at least something of what they look like. How do programs like Tangent and QMuse convert those into sounds and how is this interpreted?

Strohbeen's Artsong program and Coagula are the only two that I know that actually convert sounds from images. These other programs you mentioned (QMuse by Paul Whalley being a favorite of mine), use a template and open up variables for user input and fractal interpretation. It's like putting musical ideas into a sort of randomizer and then laying them on a template.

3. You also stated that you "arrange mathematically" as well. What type of process is this? Is there some kind of formula you use to get a certain rhythm?

I usually just use mathematical sequences (like in a math table book) - a "1" is an "a", a "2" a "b", and so on. Then I look for musicality, alter the notes, or just pursue the ordered chaos of math. . .

4. Do you find it difficult adding the dance and rhythm parts to the fractal creations?

No. The rhythms are the easy part.

5. How does the soundscapes created fractally dictate the method of rhythm and other dance fusions?

Mostly you listen for certain similarities or contrasts in mood and sound that you want to use. It's a taste thing.

6. Quite often I find numbers at the end of your song titles - Our Skies 2 or Stars 124 for example. This leads me to assume that there are another previous 123 versions of Stars?

No. Stars 124 is 124 BPM - just something to help me when I re-record the song.

7. If so, how do they differ? Are they remixes of the same data arrangement or is it that you used different data from stars to create completely new pieces?

Most songs with the same title use the same source for data. You should be able to notice certain abstract similarities as a listener.

8. How did you use AAVSO Observatory star data in your Our Skies series at Live365.com?

I translated the variable star data, reported almost every day, very precisely into a seed to be used for a particular set of templates designed with Algo-Arts Soft Step Software.

9. You're working with something that isn't completely controlled by you. Manipulated, arranged and given other elements to create a composition, yes, but how often do you arrange a fractal data structure or method to find out that you don't like the result at all?

Often. Maybe 50% of the time. Of course, the data's not to blame...usually the sounds and the idea I have for a song.

10. You do most of your music marketing online. Has this been your favorite venue, or do you prefer more traditional means of marketing?

I would prefer to sell a CD someday through stores, but manufacture is hugely expensive.

11. Many of the bands I feature in Legends have been independent in most if not all of their endeavors. How did you find yourself signed to Pivotal Records and ASCAP registered?

ASCAP will sign almost anyone patient enough and who will pay a small due. Pivotal was nice enough to reply to a demo I sent out. They are a nice, small label into experimental electronica.

12. After DJing for Acidplanet for a while and creating what you thought were just repeats of what other people had written, you started on a dark ambient experiment using H.P. Lovecraft as a background. Then you had an inspiration. And you said, "It all started with a tree," and out came a measuring tape. Tell us about how this happened. Get any weird looks measuring a tree by a bus stop?

No...I waited until I got home, then measured flowers, pretending to be the owner of the lawn. Basically, I wanted to find out what kinds of numbers to use as seeds for fractal generation - trees grow, they say, logarithmically, so why not measure a tree or other plant for its mathematical characteristics?

13. You've said that you were a "musical klutz" when it came to instruments. Can I drag an embarrassing moment out of you on this?

I think in marching band you could always find me marching to my own drummer and playing pretty far behind a given song.